

Addison's disease is a rare disorder which affects about 1 in 20,000 New Zealanders.

Addison's disease occurs when the adrenal glands stop producing normal levels of cortisol and aldosterone. The most common reason is autoimmune destruction of the adrenal glands.

Because adrenal function often declines slowly, the importance of the symptoms may not be recognised until a stressful event, illness or accident causes them to become worse, resulting in what is called an **Addison's Crisis**. Unless hydrocortisone is given promptly by injection, an Addison's crisis can be fatal.

Its rarity makes Addison's disease a lonely disorder. That's why the New Zealand Addison's Network (NZAN) was formed in 1996. Membership has steadily grown as more people have found out about NZAN. As at February 2006 we had more than 150 members throughout New Zealand.

www.addisons.org.nz

NZAN Contacts

NZAN Co-Ordinators

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For Co-Ordinators in other areas contact Jeanette Crossley.

Joining the New Zealand Addison's Network is easy.

Contact the National Co-Ordinator for more information or join online through our website
www.addisons.org.nz

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Do you often feel tired and weak?

Do you crave salty foods?

Has your skin gone darker in some places?

Have you lost weight?

Do you feel dizzy when you stand up?

Do you often feel nauseated?

Do you get exhausted in hot weather or after exercise?

You could have Addison's Disease

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Symptoms

Two common symptoms which point more clearly towards Addison's disease, are:

- **Cravings for salt**, and/or
- **Increased pigmentation** - particularly on elbows, knuckles, and inside the mouth, or an overall increased tan.

Individuals with undiagnosed Addison's disease may also have several of the following symptoms:

- Physical fatigue
- Weakness
- Dizziness on standing
- Low blood pressure
- Unplanned weight loss
- Nausea and vomiting
- Depression or irritability
- Irregular or no periods

Treatment

There is no known cure for Addison's disease, but it can be treated by taking tablets every day to replace the hormones cortisol and aldosterone.

With daily medication people who have Addison's disease can usually have a normal lifestyle.

New Zealand Addison's Network



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Addison's Diagnosis

Diagnosis can be challenging because many of the symptoms also apply to other illnesses. For this reason, and because it is rare, Addison's Disease may not initially be considered as a possibility by health professionals. Ironically many undiagnosed sufferers looked tanned and well!

Tests helpful for diagnosis include:

- Blood pressure—lying and standing (not always abnormal)
- Serum sodium and potassium (not always abnormal)
- Serum cortisol
- Serum cortisol response to injected ACTH
- 24-hour urinary cortisol
- Serum ACTH

NZAN's Goals

To supply up to date information to people with Addison's disease.

To provide a caring network to support people with Addison's disease.

To help educate health professionals to have a greater awareness of Addison's disease.

To increase the general public's awareness of Addison's Disease.

Benefits of Membership

Three newsletters per year. These are also sent to all endocrinologists and endocrinology clinics within New Zealand.

Contact with other members through the telephone and email list.

Regional and district meetings.

Opportunities for questions to NZAN's Medical Advisor, currently Professor Ian Holdaway MD FRACP (in Auckland).

Opportunities to participate in members' surveys.